

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WEB FEATURE

Colombia is trade unionist danger zone

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A plague of death threats and killings, a sham paramilitary demobilization process and almost total impunity - these are the perpetual battles facing trade unionists in Colombia. The country is one of the most dangerous places in the world to stand up for workers' rights.

A pattern of systematic attacks against trade unionists involved in labour disputes and campaigns against privatization is exposed in a new Amnesty International report.

Colombia's National Trade Union School documented 2,245 killings, 3,400 threats and 138 forced disappearances of trade unionists between January 1991 and December 2006. Sixteen have died so far this year. Army-backed paramilitaries and the security forces are thought to be behind the vast majority of attacks, despite the former's supposed demobilization. Guerrilla groups have also been responsible for threats and killings.

"Trade unionists across Colombia are being sent a clear message: don't complain about your labour conditions or campaign to protect your rights because you will be silenced, at any cost," said Susan Lee, Amnesty International's Americas Programme Director.

"By failing to adequately protect trade unionists, the Colombian authorities are sending a message that abuses against them can continue, while companies operating in Colombia risk being held accountable for human rights abuses for which, through their conduct, they may bear responsibility."

The report lists human rights abuses against trade unionists -- and their relatives -- working in Colombia's health, education, public services, agricultural, mining, oil, gas, energy and food sectors.

Trade unionists are human rights defenders. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 23, clearly states that: "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests."

Amnesty International is calling on companies working in Colombia to use their influence with the government to end and prevent human rights abuses against trade unionists.

“The attacks will continue unless effective measures are taken to end the impunity enjoyed by those killing and threatening them. This report is a wake-up call for any multinational company operating in an environment in which human rights are systematically violated. Inaction is no longer an option,” said Susan Lee.

Eberto Díaz is a leader of FENSUAGRO, a confederation of agricultural workers' unions. Members of peasant farmer unions in areas of conflict have repeatedly been the victim of human rights violations and abuses, often over land rights issues.

Edgar Mojica is a member of the oil worker's union USO. Trade unionists in these sectors have faced repeated human rights violations, often because of their opposition to privatization.

For further information, see:

[Killing, arbitrary detentions and death threats - the reality of trade unionism in Colombia](#) (report)

[Colombia: One of world's most dangerous places for trade unionists](#) (press release)

[Colombia: The reality of trade unionism](#) (case studies)

[Facts and figures](#)